Dalit Feminism in The Select Novels of Urmila Pawar and P. Sivakami

A Proposed Synopsis for the Registration of the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in English

From

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INTRODUCTION:

The world has always been divided into two binaries from beginning. These binaries include: men and women; high and low; black and white; superior and inferior; pure and impure so on and so forth. All inhuman practices i.e. slavery, class, caste and race etc. have been debated and consequently are extinct or are in process of extinction. But, gender is still in practice at everyplace in the world owing to the reason that in all other structures/institutions exploiteris distant one which is why the enemy is easily identifiable and revolt is possible. While in sexism the exploiter being the closest one remains difficult to identify which is why the complete revolt is impossibly. Even though, women across world, for past few centuries, have asserted for their rights politically but still they are in bondage socially. Ever since women began to question their place in the society; feminism, or less controversially; female empowerment has caught the world like a newfound power. From the suffragettes demanding voting rights near the close of the 19th century; the 21st century has witnesse empowerment evolving into a multi-dimensional social process occurring at multiple strata of the community; within sociological, psychological and economic dimensions to name a few. What had been just another community demanding respect; the movement has encompassed all sections of the society; with its stance write large, particularly in the literary provinces.

Dalit Feminism in Urmila Pawar's Novel:

Urmila Pawar is an Indian writer and activist in the dalit and feminist movements in India and her works, all of which are written in Marathi language, have often been hailed as a critique of social discrimination and the savarna exploitation by commentators and media outlets. Her documentation with Meenakshi Moon on the

participation of dalit women was a major contribution to the construction of dalit history from a feminist perspective in India.

Pawar's autobiography *Aydan (The Weave of My Life)*, which was one of the first of its kind account by a dalit woman, won her acclaim and numerous accolades. The book was later translated into English by Maya Pandit and released under the title *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs.* Wandana Sonalkar has written the foreword for the book.

Dalit Feminism in P. Sivakami's Novel:

P. Sivakami is an Indian Dalit-Feminist writer, former IAS officer and activist predominantly writing in Tamil. Her notable works include *Pazhayana Kazhidalum, Kurruku Vettu, Nalum Thodarum and Kadaisi Mandhar*. She is the first Tamil Dalit Woman to write a novel *Pazhiyana Kazhidalum in 1989.*

Her second novel *Anandhayi* is about the violent treatment of women and was translated into English by Pritham K Chakravarthy as *The Taming of Women* in 2011. Sivakami's novels portray the rustic story of women who suffer at the hands of men who strongly believe in and stand for patriarchy. The conflicts and struggles are between tenacious women and tyrannical men in the contemporary society.

Scope and Limitations of the Study:

The present research attempts to study about the Dalit woman and voice of the marginalized and oppressed groups of the society in the selected novels namely, *The weave of my life (Aydan), We also made History (Ahamhihi Itihas Gadhawala), Motherwit, The Grip of Change (Pazhiyana Kazhidalum), The Taming of Women (Anandhayi)*.

Thematically, her works deal with the social realities, especially with the condition of Dalit woman and other marginalized groups. Therefore, the scope of this study extends to theories of feminism and Marxism. It also encompasses individual psyche and social psyche in order to understand the causes of oppression of the marginalized massed and becomes a limited study in psychoanalysis. The study will expose the real conditions of women characters specially widows existed as oppressed and marginalized in the Orthodox society and their journey.

Literature Review:

Urmila Pawar's Novel

- ***Aayadan (The weave of My Life: A Dalit Women's Memoirs)***

The form of the autobiography in Dalit politics was crucial as it gave voice to generations of subjugation and the denial of education. This form was dominated by male writers till the 1980s when the first Dalit woman autobiography Baby Kamble's The Prisons We Broke was published. However, it was not until 2008 that it was translated into English.

Urmila Pawar continued the tradition of Dalit autobiographies and wrote *The Weave of My Life*, which is the story of three generations of women of the Mahar community. The autobiography, translated by Maya Pandit into English, is not just an individual narrative but weaves together the issues and oppression faced by the community based on their caste and gender. The narrative traces how this oppression evolves and transforms from her village to the urban city of Mumbai. The text is considered a testimonio, which is a first-person account, by the person (narrator) who has faced instances of social and political inequality, oppression, or any specific form of

marginalisation. Thus the work comes from a political standpoint and hence it is crucial for it to be translated with this lens.

- ***Amhihi Itihas Ghadawala (We also made History)***

We Also Made History: Women in the Ambedkarite Movement is the very first book detailing the history of women's qualified participation in the Dalit movement in India, led by B. R. Ambedkar. Originally written and edited in Marathi by Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon, and published in 1989, the 2008 English translation is by Wandana Sonalkar.

The book is divided into two sections: the first is a historical analysis of the participation and role of women in the Ambedkar movement, and of previous Dalit struggles in the twentieth century. The second part of the book comprises interviews and brief biographies of 45 Dalit women. These women include Ramabai Ambedkar, Dr. Ambedkar's first wife; Sulochanabai Dongre, the chair of the women's conference at the founding of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation in 1942; and Sakhubai Mohite, who was elected president of the All-India Buddhist Women's Association in 1956, after she joined Ambedkar in converting to Buddhism as a protest against the Hindu caste system.

The book is described as *"a treasure to Dalit and Dalit feminist studies"*, laying open critical issues in *feminist historiography, without resorting to abstract theoretical notions.*

- ***Mother Wit***

Mother wit is an anthology of short stories where Urmila Pawar concocts fictitious and real elements together to portray the complexities and hardships of the Dalit

community.

The characters of Mother Wit, mostly women, are individuals living in a caste-rigid, patriarchal society. They recognise their plight as someone doubly marginalised owing to their gender and the community to which they belong. Her narrative is hardly ever fraught with angst or is polemical, it is firmly assertive at best and revolutionary within itself. The women in the short stories in Mother Wit acquire their agency and autonomy through their own actions. This assumption is simply a part of Pawar's creative process and in no way is this reductive of women who have it harder and are still not empowered yet.

P. Sivakami's Novel

- ***Pazhiyana Kazhidalum (The Grip of Change)***

The first Tamil novel by a Dalit woman, *Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum,* went beyond condemning caste fanatics. Sivakami is critical of the Dalit movement and Dalit patriarchy, and yet does not become a *'caste traitor'* because of her participation in the search for solutions. The novel became an expression of Dalit youth-eager and working for change.

The narrator, a school girl seems to be observant and shows positive affinity towards her mother and her father's co-wives and rebels against her father. She, in fact undertakes an earnest attempt to educate her mother and Nagamani, her father's second wife to help them emerge out of Kathamuthu's subjugation.Sivakami portrays Gowri as the witness of her mother's experiences but she has the courage to move away from the victimized state of her mother. She is completely against the theory of her father's politics and psychology to misuse women in every possible way. She exposed and reviewed Kathamuthu's corruption, polygamy tyrannical behaviour towards his family and her

father's politics and psychology to misuse in every possible way. Gowri's plays the role of watchful observer and critic with her modern notions of the civilized world completely different from her father's conservative ones.

- ***Anandhayi (The Taming of Women)***

The Taming of Women (Anandhayi, 1992), P Sivakami's second novel, is about these two social constructs: gender and power. Translated into English by Pritham K Chakravarthy, this novel dissects village life in Tamil Nadu and provides the reader a cross-sectional view of Periyannan's family for detailed study.

It's fascinating how boys and girls in the novel grow up differently. Mani and Anbu grow up with a sense of ownership where they are held responsible for nothing. Even as young boys, they chastise their sisters on how to behave. Mani says, *"If I am not strict with her now, she will regret it in the future"*. Anbu, the youngest, is quick to anger, and is encouraged with, *"his temper is just like his father's"* as if it were a good thing.

On the other hand, Kala, Dhanam and Arul are brought up with a sense of servitude where everything is their fault. When Periyannan finds Kala riding a cycle, days after she comes of age, she is beaten black and blue and taken off school. When Dhanam's affair with Daniel is revealed, Mani thrashes her.

Significance and Relevance of the Proposed Research:

The present research is an attempt to contribute to the world of literature in some special aspects. This research work will study about the women, particularly of Dalit women and other subaltern groups as reflected in the novels of Urmila Pawar and P. Sivakami. It is seen that subaltern being marginalized sections especially women, live a disregarded, unfortunate life. The Novelist presents lively and graphic pictures of the

realistic conditions of the women of her time. It's not just a tale, it's about her experiences. The stories of the novels are based on realities prevalent in the society around. Hence, the research is not merely an examination of textual themes but it is the study of implied socio-cultural reality. It will add or contribute to the Indian literature about the subaltern groups and also to the literature dealing with Dalit women.

Research Hypothesis:

Indian Dalit writer, especially women novelists are known to deal with theme of questioning caste and gender roles among the Dalit population and within feminism and the larger women's movement. Dalit women primarily live in South Asia, mainly in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Urmila Pawar and P. Sivakami is also a Dalit writer and their literary work deals with variety of theme. But the prominent theme of their works are women and their place in Dalit society. Hence, Urmila Pawar and P. Sivakami's novel thematically and characteristically try to show the Feminist movements and Dalit feminist movement in India.

Aims and Objectives of the Study:

The main objective of the proposed research is to study the dalit feminism in the selected novel of Urmila Pawar and P Sivakami's .Besides, the present study aims.

1. To discuss the status and conditions of women, in these novels.
2. To explore the status and condition of other subaltern groups in these novels.
3. To examine these novels critically in terms of oppression, victimisation, patriarchy and society and its role in general.
4. To evaluate the nature of Subaltern and effect of Culture on their live.

Research Methodology:

The proposed work is based on both primary and secondary sources and information. The study is analytical and based on critical analysis of the selected novels of Urmila Pawar and P. Sivakami. Both descriptive and analytical method will be used to reach the conclusions. The study is not related to any kind of field work and hence the method of field work, survey etc. is not required. The primary sources are the texts of the novels, *The weave of my life (Aayadan), We also made History (Ahamhihi Itihas Gadhawala), Motherwit, The Grip of Change (Pazhiyana Kazhidalum), The Taming of Women (Anandhayi).*

The secondary sources include articles, research papers, critical books, journals, book reviews and e-content etc. The 9th Edition of MLA style would be used to cite the sources and acknowledgements.

Contribution to the Field:

The present proposal aims to contribute knowledge about the problem faced by Dalits, especially Dalit women. It introduces a new dimension in literature, offering fresh insights and creating awareness of the torment faced by Dalits at the hand of non-Dalits in India. The study investigates the heart-rendering abuse experienced by Dalits. Furthermore, it examines how Urmila Pawar and P.Shivkami portray the life of Dalit women in the society. This proposal will make a significant contribution to the field of marginalized members.

Tentative Chapter Scheme:

The tentative chapter scheme of the research work will be as follows:

Chapter I- Introduction: Life and Works of the Authors.

Chapter II- Study of Dalit Feminism in Urmila Pawar's Novels.

Chapter III- Study of Dalit Feminism in P. Sivakami's Novels.

Chapter IV- Comparative Study of Urmila Pawar and P. Sivakami's Novels.

Chapter V- Similarity in Urmila Pawar and P. Sivakami's Novels.

Chapter VI- Conclusion.

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